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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 003242

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: EVO'S "HARD HAND" PUSHES CHUQUISACA AWAY

REF: LA PAZ 3209

Classified By: EcoPol Counselor Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Chuquisaca, Bolivia's third smallest department was firmly in the ruling Movement Toward Socialism's (MAS) camp in recent (2005 and 2006) elections. However, the MAS' hard-line toward Sucre's proposal to be restored as the nation's full capital and the tragic events of November 23-25, in which three young Sucre residents were killed and over 400 people injured, has tilted public opinion against the MAS. Sucre city leaders argue that the MAS could no longer win in their city and Chuquisaca department (state) as a whole. Nonetheless, unseating the MAS in Chuquisaca is not a forgone conclusion. While many in Sucre will likely abandon the party and President Morales should there be elections in 2008, Chuquisaca's size prevents it from being a deciding factor in a presidential election. Newly disillusioned MAS voters would have to transfer their vote en-masse to another party (such as PODEMOS) to prevent the MAS from still picking up the bulk of the departments' congressional seats. The prefecture is perhaps the only job where the MAS is truly vulnerable. End Note.

Chuquisaca 2005/2006: MAS Wins Easily

2. (U) Chuquisaca is Bolivia's third smallest department in terms of population (representing five percent of the electorate). In 2005 and 2006, Chuquisaca was solidly behind Evo Morales and his MAS party. Sucre city represents nearly 60 percent of Chuquisaca's electorate, with the remaining 40 percent of the department is largely rural.

3. (U) In the December 2005 presidential and prefecture (governor's) election, Evo Morales' MAS party easily beat all other political parties. Morales won 54 percent of the vote

in Chuquisaca, and just over 52 percent in Sucre. Of the 28 different Chuquisaca presidential voting districts, the MAS had an absolute majority (50 percent or more) in 19. MAS candidate David Sanchez won the prefecture with 42 percent of the vote, his next closest competitor (from the PODEMOS party) received 36 percent of the vote. The MAS also won seven of Chuquisaca departments eleven lower house seats and two of department's three senate seats.

14. (U) In the July 2006 Constituent Assembly election the MAS actually performed better than in December 2005. The MAS won 14 of Chuquisaca's 23 assembly seats. Of the 28 different Chuquisaca voting districts, the MAS had an absolute majority (50 percent or more) in 21. More importantly the MAS improved its percentage vote of the vote in 25 of the 28 districts. Sucre city was one of three districts where the MAS performed worse, losing about 4 percentage points, but its closest rival, the PODEMOS party fell even further losing 17 percentage points.

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Sucre City Leaders -- MAS Friendly No Longer  
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15. (C) Emboff and a contingent of diplomatic officials from France and Italy met with Sucre mayor Aydee Nava and City Council President Fidel Herrera on December 5. Both Navaa and Herrera focused most of their discussion on the central government's "brutal repression" of their city's residents "who peacefully protested against the MAS' convening of the Constituent Assembly" at a military installation outside of Sucre November 23-25. They confirmed that the conflicts resulted in three deaths and argued that there was no doubt, despite government pronouncements to the contrary, that the deaths were the result of police actions. Navaa and Herrera presented video evidence that some elite police forces were carrying lethal firearms contrary to Government Minister Alfredo Rada's numerous announcements that police only possessed crowd control (non-lethal) weapons.

16. (C) Both Nava and Herrera shared that public opinion in Sucre has turned resolutely against the government and the ruling MAS party. They explained that the MAS via its "illegal actions" in the Constituent Assembly and its forbidding of discussion on the returning of the executive and legislative branch to Sucre had alienated all but the most ardent MAS supporters in Sucre. Time and again, Herrera and Nava stated that Sucre had always been a peaceful city that avoided Bolivia's heated "street" politics until the Constituent Assembly. They explained that Sucre's citizens would never have gone to the streets had it not been for the MAS' very heavy-handed tactics. Nava explained that she herself had voted for President Evo Morales in December 2005, but would never do so again.

17. (C) Both Nava and Herrera expressed little sympathy for Chuquisaca Prefect David Sanchez who fled Sucre on November 24 after people destroyed and looted his home. Nava argued that Sanchez, because he was from the MAS, did nothing to defend Sucre's interests within the Constituent Assembly and failed to get the government to back down from its hard-line in Sucre November 23-25. Sanchez who left Sucre is seeking asylum in the United States or elsewhere, argues that he did try to advocate for his department and Sucre, but that President Morales and other government officials did not work with him in good faith.

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Still Distrust Amongst Police and Civil Society  
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18. (SBU) Emboff also visited four important police installations ) the transit police complex, the Chuquisaca department police headquarters, Sucre local police headquarters, and the San Roque prison ) that were destroyed (or heavily damaged) following the November 23-25 violence. The police after suffering from attacks by angry Sucre residents and fearing for their safety departed the city

midday November 25. They only returned late November 28, leaving the city without police protection for three entire days. Most of the severe looting occurred on November 25.

¶10. (SBU) The transit police complex was the most damaged, with 65 cars completely burned (and unsalvageable) down to their metal exoskeleton. Only 25 of the cars were official police vehicles, the remainder were the officers' private vehicles and impounded cars. All offices had been looted, traffic records had been burned and police equipment (including computers) stolen. The Chuquisaca department police headquarters was badly burned, and according to police officers police records were completely ransacked, leaving almost no case files (past and present). During the visit officers mentioned that approximately 30 prisoners still remained at large from the November 25 San Roque jail break. Police officials acknowledged that only the "worst criminals" with the longest sentences had not returned to prison. Prisoners with short sentences returned within hours of the November 25 jail break.

¶11. (SBU) The police argue that angry Sucre residents forced them to leave the city, that it was not a government decision. City officials told emboffs the destruction was a response to police's "brutal repression" of "peaceful protesters." The police, including newly appointed Sucre commander Colonel Casceres argue that Sucre civic leaders incited the destruction. Police officials have privately and publicly denied aiding in the San Roque jail break, stating they had to let people leave the facility because residents had set fire to the building. The mayor and city council president argue that any fires within the prison were minor and the police released the prisoners as means of revenge on the city.

¶12. (C) Comment: There remains serious distrust between the police and city residents. The police are working out of makeshift facilities and have no vehicles in which to conduct their normal activities. The city leadership views the police as allied with the national government. Mayor Nava explained that the city would "not pay one cent of the reconstruction and refurbishing of police facilities," arguing it was the central government's responsibility since it was the central government that provoked the city's residents. End Comment.

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Human Rights Ombudsman Viewed as MAS-Loyalist  
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¶13. (SBU) Emboff also met with the local representative of the Human Rights Ombudsman Sonia Soto. Soto explained that her office had not received any formal complaints regarding the November 23-25 violence, but expected that her office might receive some in the near future. Soto acknowledged that people in Sucre view her office as allied with the government; she explained that few understand it is an independent agency. She stated that on occasion her office has received threats by anti-MAS groups. (Note: The Santa Cruz Human Rights Ombudsman's office was attacked November ¶25. End Note).

¶14. (C) Comment: Soto does not appear to be helping her case that her office is independent. As the local representative of the Human Rights Ombudsman, she has the authority to investigate cases of human rights abuses regardless of whether her office has received a direct complaint. Furthermore the Human Rights Ombudsman office (both nationally and locally) was silent (did not issue a statement) up until late on November 24. Her explanation for the silence is that the national Human Rights Ombudsman, Waldo Albarracin, was outside the country and she was not in Sucre on the day the violence started in earnest. Nonetheless, in the past the Human Rights Ombudsman's office has issued statements almost immediately upon the emergence of violence between civil society and government authorities. Critics of Waldo Albarracin state he is too close to government officials, arguing his close friendship with Vice

Minister Sacha Llorenti impacts his ability to be independent. Llorenti was one of the first Morales administration officials to defend the government's actions in Sucre. End Comment.

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Recent Events Further Split MAS from Chuquisaca  
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¶15. (SBU) On December 10, after the MAS passed its constitution (in detail and revision at yet another location (ref) pictures of MAS Constituent Assembly delegates from Chuquisaca were posted around the town square with the word "traitors" scrawled on them. On December 11, Mayor Nava called on the opposition departments, who are planning to announce their autonomy around December 15, to include Sucre as the "nation's full capital" (seat of not only the judicial but also the executive and legislative branches) in its autonomy statutes. Also on December 11, the Bolivian Senate censured Government Minister Alfredo Rada for his involvement in the November 23-25 violence (septel). President Morales immediately overturned the censure, further alienating people in Sucre and Chuquisaca.

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Comment  
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¶16. (C) Chuquisaca, with only five percent of the electorate, will have little impact on any nationwide presidential elections (or recall referendums) in 2008, if there are indeed such elections. In congressional elections Morales' "hard-hand" might have slightly more of an impact, but the odds are still in the MAS' favor. In 2005, the MAS won two of its directly elected lower house seats by less than a 900 votes, and a third by 1300. These three seats may be in jeopardy, assuming the MAS does not gerrymander voting districts, which it might be able to do once it controls the National Electoral Court after the current director's term end January 7. If the opposition could unite under one banner it also could win two senate seats, rather than its current one. But, the opposition is divided and PODEMOS, the party that could most effectively use the MAS voters to eclipse the MAS, is perhaps the least likely party to pickup the disaffected voters. Also, if the MAS' new constitution passes a public referendum, the MAS is all but guaranteed the newly created indigenous upper house seat.

¶17. (C) The prefecture is perhaps where the MAS' policies will be most felt in Chuquisaca. Prefect David Sanchez won with only 42 percent of the vote, his PODEMOS runner-up 36 percent. With Sanchez politically burned and likely in exile out of the country at the time of the 2008 elections, the MAS will have to put forth another candidate. Currently there are few (if any) MASistas at the departmental level which can garner much support. Meanwhile, the charismatic Sucre city council president Fidel Herrera, one of the faces of Sucre's resistance to the government November 23-25, told emboff in August he would likely make a bid for the prefecture when new elections are called. End Comment.

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